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Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here

SFMOMA explores nearly five decades of the artist's work, including the reactivation of a past performance with local participants and the premiere of a major new work.

YBCA's presentation highlights Lacy's major projects that engaged youth in Colombia and the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1990s, and includes new presentations by Bay Area organizations and artists working with youth today.



At YBCA: Suzanne Lacy, Julio César Morales, and Unique Holland, *Code 33: Emergency, Clear the Air!*, 1997–99, from *The Oakland Projects*, 1991–2001; performance, October 7, 1999, City Center West Parking Garage, Oakland; © Suzanne Lacy; photo: Kelli Yon



At SFMOMA: Suzanne Lacy, *The Circle and the Square*, 2017 (production still); filmed performance, Brierfield Mill, Brierfield, Lancashire, United Kingdom; © Suzanne Lacy; photo: Chris Payne

Press Preview: April 18, 2019
Exhibition on view April 20–August 4, 2019
at YBCA: First Floor Galleries
and at SFMOMA: Floor 7 and Haas, Jr. Atrium

SAN FRANCISCO (March 7, 2019)—Co-organized by [Yerba Buena Center for the Arts \(YBCA\)](#) and the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art \(SFMOMA\)](#), *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* is the first major retrospective of Lacy's fifty-year career. Conceived as one exhibition at two venues, the SFMOMA presentation features approximately seventy solo and collaborative works from Lacy's earliest feminist performances and photographs to her recent immersive video installations. The YBCA presentation departs from the traditional retrospective format and focuses instead on an experimental approach to authorship and participation by exhibiting two of Lacy's groundbreaking works, *The Oakland Projects* (1991–2001) and *La piel de la memoria / Skin of Memory* (1999), as an entry point to examine today's youth culture and media activism.

Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here is jointly curated by **Rudolf Frieling**, curator of media arts at SFMOMA; **Lucía Sanromán**, director of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City, and YBCA curator at large; and **Dominic Willson**, director of the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University and former Leanne and George Roberts Curator of Education and Public Practice at SFMOMA. *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* is on view at YBCA and SFMOMA **April 20 through August 4, 2019**.

YBCA Presentation

The Oakland Projects (1991–2001, including collaborations with Chris Johnson, Annice Jacoby, Julio Morales, and Unique Holland) and *La piel de la memoria / Skin of Memory* (1999, with Colombian anthropologist Pilar Riaño-Alcalá) are long-term projects and performances in which Lacy and her many collaborators worked with government, education, and social service agencies to engage with youth and address the structural stresses inherent in urban spaces. *La piel de la memoria / Skin of Memory* engaged young people in the creation of a civic process to address systems of violence and trauma in Medellín, Colombia. *The Oakland Projects* provided public-school youth tools to create their own media images to counter the negative representations of them prevalent in the media in the 1990s.

Lacy is working with **Unique Holland**, a past participant and collaborator of *The Oakland Projects*, on a new multichannel video installation to explore the underlying systemic issues that created oppressive conditions for Oakland youth at the time of the original project. YBCA celebrates Lacy's rich legacy of youth-focused work in the Bay Area today through the inclusion of organizations and artists who are placing young people in control of their stories and representations. **YR Media** is working with eight young creatives to offer visitors a visual and sonic impression of gentrification in Oakland. **Youth Speaks** will exhibit a multimedia installation that illustrates the creative process of their poets. **The Center for Media Justice** will present an interactive timeline that traces their role in the nationwide movement around media organizing, which began by amplifying the ongoing work of challenging media bias against youth of color—efforts that Lacy touched upon in *The Oakland Projects*. Harkening back to the classroom roots of *The Oakland Projects*, students will exhibit two projects from YBCA's residency at San Francisco's **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School**. These projects will illustrate San Francisco through the lens of approximately one hundred eighth-grade students. At Oakland's Fremont High School, the location of *The Oakland Projects* performance *Eye 2 Eye at Fremont High* (2000), transdisciplinary artist **Caleb Duarte** is collaborating with students who have migrated from Central America as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

Curator **Lucía Sanromán** elaborates on the exhibition strategy of creating a major update to these very relevant issues: "Given the participatory nature of *The Oakland Projects*, it is

important to break down the category of ‘author’ in our presentation, and look for methodologies that allow for distributed authorship. At YBCA, we interpret this as dedicating gallery space to organizations that have maintained proven relationships to youth since the 1990s and continue this work today. This approach distributes authorship away from the artist and the institution, and toward young people and their advocates now. It underscores YBCA’s commitment to youth work.”

SFMOMA Presentation

At SFMOMA, Lacy’s retrospective encompasses the diverse range of mediums the artist has explored throughout her career, including performance, photography, film, sculpture, video installation, drawing, artist’s books, and ephemera. Spanning from Lacy’s projects in the 1970s to her latest video installations, SFMOMA’s presentation also features the world premiere of the video installation of *De tu puño y letra* (By Your Own Hand, 2015/2019), which draws from letters written by Ecuadorian women about their experiences of violence. Also included is the US debut of *The Circle and the Square* (2017), which explores the racial and religious consequences of globalized capitalism in England.

“This retrospective requires an exhibition approach that historicizes the artworks while simultaneously anchoring the exhibition in the present day,” remarks **Rudolf Frieling**. “These projects are not over—the artist rewrites the scripts and the framing of these works from the perspective of our time.”

Lacy’s ethically committed, participatory performances and large-scale projects have blurred the line between life and art. Several works on view at SFMOMA honor the voices and contributions of women to public life, and embody Lacy’s role as a pioneer of feminist art practice since the early 1970s. Her best-known performances convening groups of women, such as *Three Weeks in May* (1977), *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977, with Leslie Labowitz), and *The Crystal Quilt* (1987), are represented through videos, photographs, and sculptural elements. Attesting to the artist’s lasting relationship with the Bay Area, several coauthored works on view were originally staged in San Francisco, including *Alterations* (1994, with Susanne Cockrell and Britta Kathmeyer), *Freeze Frame: Room for Living Room* (1982, with Julia London), and *International Dinner Party* (1979, with Linda Preuss)—a work that comes full circle after having been performed at SFMOMA in 1979 at the opening of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*. The exhibition will constantly reflect both the process and the result of social practice and its corresponding audiovisual production.

The installation/performance *Alterations* (1994–95) and the performance *Cleaning Conditions* (2013) address issues of labor and will be updated and activated at SFMOMA with local participants. In addition, both institutions will present a robust array of public programs. The SFMOMA programs will focus on feminism, and the YBCA programs will focus on youth.

OPENING WEEKEND PROGRAMS

April 20, 3pm, at SFMOMA

Gallery Talk: Curatorial walkthrough

On opening day of *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here*, join the curators for a walkthrough of the

show's SFMOMA galleries and gain insights into the issues, historical context, and choices shaping the artist's installations.

April 20, 4pm, at SFMOMA

Suzanne Lacy in conversation with Lucy Lippard

On opening day of *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here*, join the artist in conversation with writer and curator Lucy Lippard. The two will discuss their contributions to feminist art in the 1970s—when they each explored new genres of artistic practice that intertwined conceptual art and activism—and how their work and views have since evolved.

Lucy R. Lippard is a writer, activist, sometime curator, and author of twenty-four books on contemporary art and cultural criticism, including *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (1984), *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997), and most recently *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* (2014). She has received numerous awards and has cofounded various artists' organizations and publications. She lives off the grid in rural Galisteo, New Mexico, where for twenty-one years she has edited the monthly community newsletter *El Puente de Galisteo*.

April 20, 6–9pm, at YBCA

Opening Night Party

Celebrate the opening of *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* with an evening filled with art, DJs, dancing, and special performances from Youth Speaks, YR Media, and Caleb Duarte with students from Fremont High School's Newcomer Educational Support and Transition (NEST) program.

April 21, 10:30am–5pm, at SFMOMA

Symposium

We Are Here: Conversations

As a part of the retrospective exhibition *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here*, SFMOMA brings together curators and scholars to discuss the impact of feminism on contemporary artistic practice. This day-long symposium includes a screening of Lynn Hershman Leeson's *!Women Art Revolution* (2010), which documents the challenges faced by women artists within the larger framework of the civil rights movement, and features artists such as Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, and the Guerilla Girls. Panel discussions offer firsthand perspectives into feminist curatorial practice and recent exhibitions, as well as explorations of feminism as it intersects with issues of race, class, sexuality, gender, and the levers of power and privilege. Speakers include Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Astria Suparak, Apsara DiQuinzio, and Jacqueline Francis.

In conjunction with the exhibition:

April 20, 12–2pm and ongoing, Curatorial Research Bureau at YBCA

Community Building and Artistic Practice: A Conversation

Students enrolled in CCA's graduate program in curatorial practice will design a program that takes inspiration from Suzanne Lacy's social practice, and will feature a panel discussion and conversation surrounding themes covered in the exhibition.

PUBLICATION

Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here is accompanied by a 288-page catalogue featuring approximately four hundred illustrations; curatorial essays by Rudolf Frieling, Lucía Sanromán, and Dominic Willson; contributions by Jessica D. Brier, Christa Cesario, Lucia Fabio, Taylor Shoolery, and Tanya Zimbaro; and new and archival commentary on Lacy's work by peers and collaborators. The catalogue is coedited by Frieling, Sanromán, and Willson, and published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with DelMonico Books • Prestel.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Based in Los Angeles, **Suzanne Lacy** has created artworks ranging from intimate body explorations to large-scale public performances, often involving hundreds of performers. Born in 1945 in Wasco, California, Lacy became a key participant in the feminist movement and performance art scene in Southern California in the 1970s. She has exhibited in The Tanks at Tate Modern, London; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the New Museum, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; and the Biennale of Sydney, among many other venues. She has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Henry Moore Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She lectures widely and has published more than seventy texts of critical commentary, several of which are featured in her book *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974–2007* (2010). Her influential book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995) is now in its third printing. She was a founding faculty member at California State University at Monterey Bay (with Judy Baca) in the mid-1990s. Lacy was founding chair of the MFA program in public practice at Otis College of Art and Design. She holds an MFA from California Institute of the Arts and a PhD from Gray's School of Art at Robert Gordon University in Scotland, and currently teaches at the University of Southern California Roski School of Art and Design.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Lucía Sanromán is the newly appointed director of Laboratorio de Arte Alameda, Mexico City. She joined YBCA as director of visual arts in October 2015, and became YBCA curator at large in September 2018. She received The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts program grant in 2016 for her work at YBCA, and has curated and organized The City Initiative program, a series of exhibitions by architects, designers, planners, and artists creating provocative work in the urban environment, including *Teddy Cruz and FONNA FORMAN, Visualizing Citizenship: Seeking a New Public Imagination* (2017), *Damon Rich and Jae Shin: Space Brainz—Yerba Buena 3000* (2018), and *The Open Workshop: New Investigations in Collective Form* (2018, co-organized with Martin Strickland). Under the program title Changing the Ratio: Female Artists at YBCA, she has organized survey exhibitions of key women artists, including *Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder* (2017, co-curated with Susie Kantor), *Futurefarmers: Out of Place, in Place* (2018), and *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* (2019).

Rudolf Frieling has been SFMOMA's curator of media arts since 2006. At the museum, he recently co-curated *Soundtracks* (2017–18) and *Bruce Conner: It's All True* (2016), and he has organized more than twenty exhibitions, including *Sublime Seas: John Akomfrah and J. M. W. Turner* (2018), *William Kentridge: The Refusal of Time* (2017), *Film as Place* (2016), *Christian Marclay: The Clock* (2013), *Lynn Hershman Leeson: The Agent Ruby Files* (2013), *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Frequency and Volume* (2012–13), *Stage Presence: Theatricality in Art and*

Media (2012), *Descriptive Acts* (2012), *Sharon Lockhart: Lunch Break* (2011), and the influential survey exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (2008). Spearheading the notion of the museum as producer, Frieling has commissioned numerous works for SFMOMA's public spaces, including Jim Campbell's *Exploded Views* (2011–12) and Bill Fontana's *Sonic Shadows* (2010). Frieling is an adjunct faculty member at California College of the Arts and lectures internationally on media history and theory. He was a curator and researcher at ZKM, Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 1994 to 2006. He holds a master's degree from Free University of Berlin and a PhD from the University of Hildesheim.

Dominic Willsdon is the newly appointed executive director of the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. From 2006 to 2018 he was the Leanne and George Roberts Curator of Education and Public Practice at SFMOMA, where he directed programming in public dialogue, school initiatives, performance, and film. He was a co-curator of the art and humanities project Public Knowledge, and co-editor of *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good* (2016) and *Visual Activism* (2016). Willsdon co-curated *Public Intimacy: Art and Other Ordinary Acts in South Africa* (2014) at YBCA as part of SFMOMA On the Go. He was a co-curator of the 2016 Liverpool Biennial and a pedagogical curator of the 2013 Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Before joining SFMOMA he was the curator of public programs at Tate Modern in London (2000–2005). He holds a master's degree and a PhD in philosophy from the University of Essex, and a master's degree in fine arts from Edinburgh University. He was a lecturer in critical theory at the Royal College of Art, London (1999–2005) and a lecturer in the history of modern art at England's Open University and Birkbeck College at the University of London (1995–99).

CREDITS

Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here is co-organized by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The YBCA presentation is made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Circle of Advisors for Changing the Ratio: Female Artists at YBCA: Abundance Foundation, Berit Ashla, Diana Cohn, EMIKA Fund, Jennifer C. Haas Fund, La Mar Cebichería Peruana, Rekha Patel, Catalina Ruiz-Healy and Jonathan Kevles, Vicki Shipkowitz, and Meg Spriggs, with thanks to the Facebook Artist in Residence Program. Additional support provided by Amanda Weil.

At SFMOMA, major support for *Suzanne Lacy: We Are Here* is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Generous support is provided by Lionel F. Conacher and Joan T. Dea. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

YBCA exhibitions are made possible in part by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Panta Rhea Foundation, Mellon / American Council of Learned Societies Public Fellows Program, and Kevin King and Meridee Moore.

YBCA programs are made possible in part by Bloomberg Philanthropies and The James Irvine Foundation, with additional funding by National Endowment for the Arts, Grosvenor, and YBCA Members.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is grateful to the City of San Francisco for its ongoing support.

ABOUT YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

701 Mission Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 11 AM–6 PM and Thursday 11 AM–8 PM.

Closed Monday.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is one of the nation's most innovative contemporary arts centers. Founded in 1993, YBCA's mission is to generate culture that moves people. Through powerful art experiences, thoughtful and provocative content, and deep opportunities for participation, YBCA is committed to creating an inclusive culture that awakens personal and societal transformation. YBCA presents a wide variety of programming year-round, including performing arts, visual arts, and civic engagement. For tickets and information, call 415.978.ARTS (2787). For more information, visit ybca.org.

ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

151 Third Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Open Friday–Tuesday 10 AM–5 PM and Thursday 10 AM–9 PM. Closed Wednesday.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is dedicated to making the art for our time a vital and meaningful part of public life. Founded in 1935 as the first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, a thoroughly transformed SFMOMA, with triple the gallery space, an enhanced education center, and new free public galleries, opened to the public on May 14, 2016. Since then, the expanded museum has welcomed more than one million visitors annually. Visit sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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